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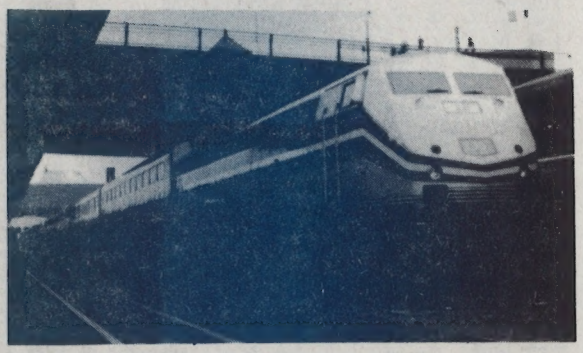

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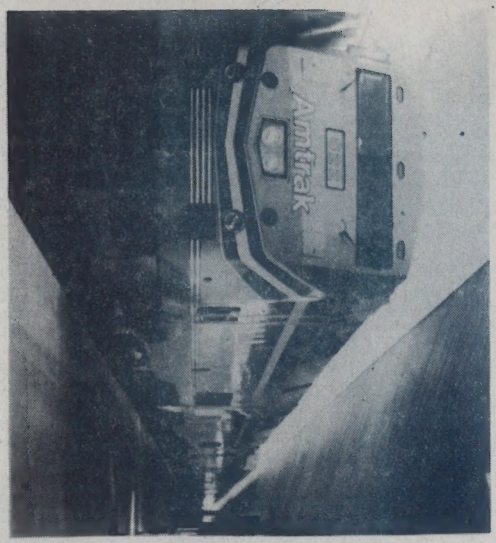

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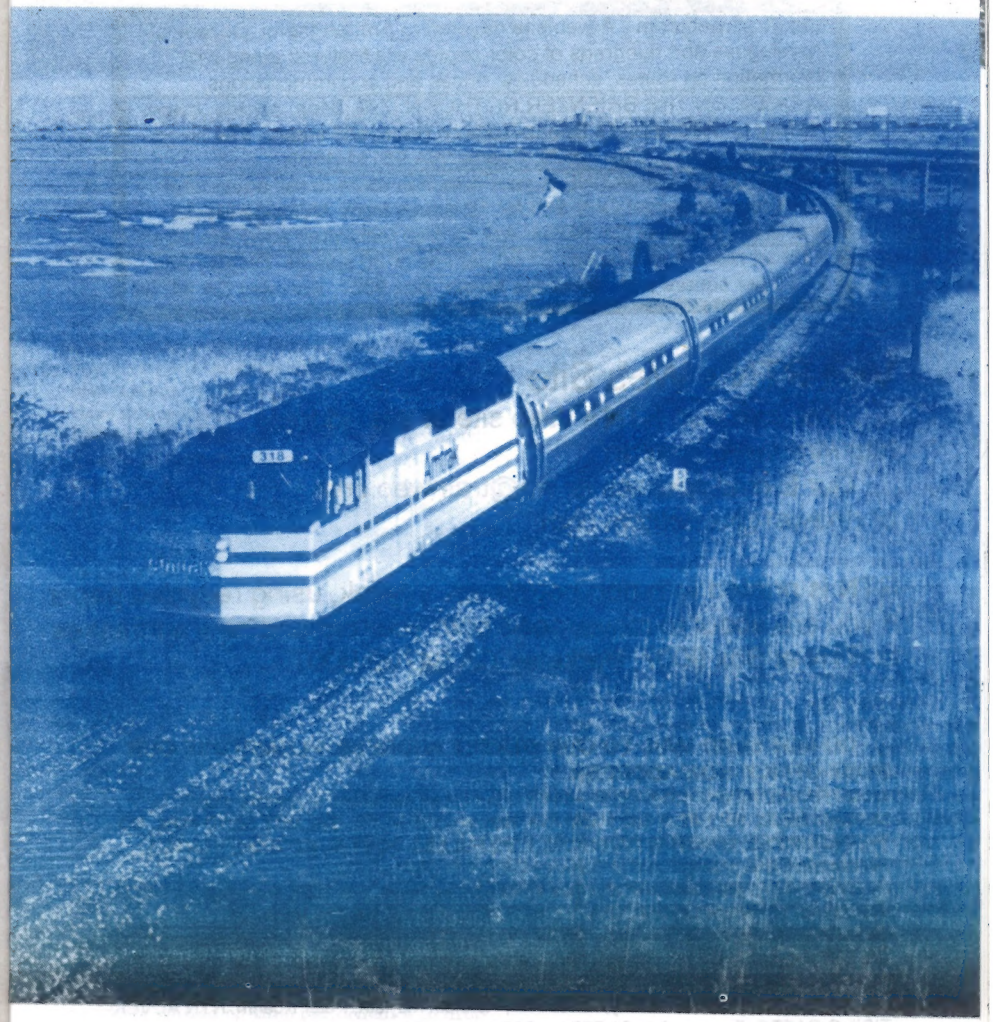

ON THE COVER

Amtrak's ATLANTIC CITY EXPRESS, train 684, led by F40 engine no. 318, crosses the salt marshes near Absecon NJ on May 27, 1989. Though Amtrak's service here has been discontinued, NJ Transit still serves the Atlantic City line. For a late report on that NJT service, see East Coast Report in this issue. Photo by Carl Miller.

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EAST COAST REPORT

Amtrak's southbound MAYFLOWER, train 171, seen at Harewood Park MD on April 5, rates two locomotives, each in a different paint scheme. Photo by Bill Hakkarinen.

A subway train derailed at about 10pm on July 3 on the IND line near the 135th St station in Harlem. The rear wheels of the last car (eighth car) of a southbound A train left the track at a switch and rolled onto a spur track. As the train moved along at about 25mph, the car hit a cement wall separating the spur track from the track it should have been on, demolishing the car. The wreckage was so mangled that workers used blowtorches to cut it up for removal. There were minor injuries to 13 passengers and two firemen. The line was closed down for nearly 24 hours, disrupting service for thousands of users on a slow holiday Friday. The derailment's cause was not immediately known.

The Oyster Bar, a famous 84-year old restaurant on the lower level of NYC's Grand Central Terminal, was gutted by fire early on June 29. Metro-North said that the blaze began when a refrigerator motor overheated. The heat melted kitchen equipment, damaged the tile interior of the dining room, and filled the Terminal with smoke. There were no delays to Metro-North service. The restaurant management said it would take two weeks to get back in business.

A summer storm on June 26, with heavy rain and high winds, caused delays to Metro-North's Hudson Line when a fallen tree at Hastings damaged the third rail on track 3. At Irvington, utility cables and tree branches blew onto the tracks. West of Stamford, on the New Haven Line, a tree became tangled in the catenary wires, damaging them and causing signal failures from there to Mount Vernon. Wire damage also occurred at Harrison. These problems caused on-time performance to drop. For the week that included that Thursday, Metro-North New Haven Line performance was 91.4%, Hudson Line 92.5% and Harlem Line 97.4%. Systemwide performance to that date was 96.7%, still above M-N's goal for the year of 96.5%.

The Bronxville Station renovation was, according to M-N, kicking into high gear at the end of June. Lead removal was to get underway, with the station covered in a plastic tarp while old paint was blasted away. The entire project, including a new roof, restoration of historical elements, patching, painting, etc., should be finished by year-end.

Metro-North said that June 30 was the first-year anniversary of the opening of the Cortlandt Station, the first new station in NY State since Metro-North was created. The station combined the ridership from Montrose and Crugers and provided 750 more parking spaces for commuters.

Noting that Albany has collected $2.6 billion in unanticipated revenue for NY State, letter writer Carter Craft said (NY Times July 5) that it is time to build the proposed rail freight tunnel below NY Harbor. "While we seem eager to pour millions more into widening the Staten Island Expressway, a new Gowanus alignment could include a light rail link connecting Staten Island and Brooklyn over the Verrazano [bridge]. With major transportation issues in each borough, the city should try to tie some of these disparate links together with the kinds of long-term solutions for which we were once famous: bridges, tunnels and railways."

Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell in mid-June notified SEPTA that unless its 1998-2009 capital budget and program is modified to provide more transit and rail improvements to the city of Philadelphia, he will instruct the city's two reps to veto the capital program when it comes before SEPTA's board for a vote.

"If these accommodations are not forthcoming, we will be left with no choice but to veto the SEPTA 1998-2009 Capital Budget and Program," Mayor Rendell warned SEPTA General manager John K. Leary by letter. The SEPTA board's two city reps have veto power over any decisions or votes made by reps from surrounding suburban counties, the governor and two houses of the state legislature.

Rendell specifically cited promises by then-General Manager Louis Gambaccini in 1992 to restore trolley service on city routes 15, 23 and 56, centered in North Philadelphia. These routes were converted to bus in 1992, though tourist-oriented trolley service periodically ran since then on segments of Route 23, and all routes have been covered by periodic inspection trips using Kawasaki LRVs.

These routes were to have trolley operation restored by 2000. Now it is unlikely, according to SEPTA's latest plans, to return to trolley operation before 2004. SEPTA would have used the Kawasaki cars bumped from the five-route subway-surface network by as-yet-unordered new LRVs.

The may also railed against delays in Suburban station and Broad Street Line station improvements, and supported construction of a new station on the Airport rail line in Eastwick in SW Philadelphia.

"Investment in new transit services in the City, which is transit-dependent from many perspectives, will have far greater payouts than most new suburban service initiatives contained in the budget proposal," Rendell wrote SEPTA. General Manager Leary said every issue raised by Rendell, including trolley restoration, is being taken seriously.

NJ Transit's Atlantic City line, despite growing ridership, is continually fraught with dangers and annoyances to its passengers and employees.

A number of engineers and conductors who work the trains have complained of strong, sickening odors from lavatory facilities on the trains. Several have been taken to hospitals at the end of their trips for emergency treatment. A conductor who made two trips to the hospital after completing his trips told the South Jersey Courier-Post newspaper that a specialist who examined him said there is a health risk. The doctor who examined the conductor diagnosed him as having bronchial asthma, probably as a result of repeated exposure to chlorine emanating from an inadvertent mix of chlorine-containing and alkaline solutions.

Several NJT workers spoke to the Courier-Post on condition of anonymity, out of fear of retribution by NJT management, according to the paper.

NJT, in a prepared statement, said it "has been conducting an internal investigation into employee complaints for the past several months and has been unable to identify any problem related to the toilets. The investigation included extensive testing of the equipment. No health risks were reported."

But an engineer, who said he and his conductor, who was five months pregnant at the time, once stopped a train midway between Philadelphia and Atlantic City due to illness from the chemical odor, said the problems had been going on since December, and passengers had also complained.

The engineers said the problem began with foul-smelling waste-holding tanks, then escalated when maintainers began adding chlorine-based disinfectants to the lavatory equipment.

A rep of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers said that originally NJT was "trying to stuff the whole thing...keep it down. Now, they're really trying to solve the problem." He said NJT has identified problems with maintenance practices by an outside contractor and with leaks from a chlorine canister. Maintenance procedures are being changed and cars may be retrofitted. Any toilet malfunctions are now addressed more promptly, said the BLE rep.

The lavatories' manufacturer, Microphor, told the Courier-Post that toilet holding tanks on rail cars "provide an environment in which bacteria break solid wastes into liquids, which then flow through redwood filters into a second tank and finally into a third tank, where chlorine is present to kill any remaining bacteria before the liquid is dumped onto the tracks."

This last item is surprising, since Congress in the late 1980s legislated a ban on train lavatories being dumped on the tracks and required Amtrak to retrofit all its rolling stock with retention-type toilets, in which waste is flushed to holding tanks for eventual removal by pumping equipment. It's curious that commuter lines are allowed treatment-type lavatories and Amtrak is not.

The typical two- or three-car trainset on the Atlantic City commuter line has one lavatory, located in the cab control car. In perspective, none of NJT's buses have restrooms. Equipment used includes Pullman-Standard and Bombardier-built push-pull cars built in the early 1970s and 1980s. Push-pull cars rebuilt from Arrow I electric MUs originally built by St. Louis Car Co. in 1968 are also used.

A far worse danger to riders is ongoing vandalism at the Atco station in Camden County, which has spread to stations in Hammonton, Absecon and Egg Harbor City in Atlantic County. The most frequent acts are shattering of windows on vehicles parked at these stations. An electrician employed at an Atlantic City casino returned home after midnight to find one of her car windows smashed, and soon afterwards gathered 200 signatures from fellow riders on a petition to NJ Transit to increase security on the line. The petition warns NJT that people will stop riding trains unless station surveillance cameras are installed or transit patrols increased.

A conductor on the line, Cliff Williamson, wrote NJDOT Commissioner John J. Haley that poor security was a major flaw on the line. State Senator John Adler of Camden County also wrote to Haley, asking whether security cameras could be installed at Atlco to curtail theft and vandalism.

NJT has yet to act on the letters and petition. "We're trying to evaluate what we can do given the limited resources that we have," NJT spokesman Steve Coleman told The Press of Atlantic City. NJT has 154 police officers to patrol 178 bus routes and 12 rail lines statewide. Five officers are currently assigned to the Atlantic City line, up from one in 1994.

Vandalism has been occurring at Atco since the rail line opened in 1989 and is not limited to car windows. Neighborhood youths, say some riders, use the station as an under-age drinking hangout. After ticket vending machines were installed at the station in 1995, an NJT rep told this writer of an incident in which a person or persons tried driving a forklift up the wheelchair ramp, between the parking lot and the elevated platform, obviously to attempt to remove or damage the ticket machines. The ramp has two turns too sharp for a typical forklift, so the machines were unharmed. Also, there are the graffiti and defacement all too common to rail and transit station.s

All these problems could not come at a worse time. NJT's board is making fiscal 1998 the make-or-break year for the Atlantic City line. Unless ridership increases further or losses are cut, the line will be up for closure next year. Yet, as The Press of Atlantic City editorialized, "It's unfair not to provide it with every opportunity for success." Besides improved and visible security, "it behooves NJ Transit to make sure the rail line is visible as well. It needs to more effectively market and promote the line in a region of the state that isn't used to having rail service."

—James Thornton.

REVISED SCHEDULES

TAKE EFFECT JULY 10

(Shown above are graphics from a NE Corridor schedule revision card, with effective date July 10. Below is reprinted the text of that card)

On July 10, Amtrak will make significant improvements and schedule changes to *NortheastDirect* Service between Boston and Virginia. These changes include the inauguration of extended, deluxe service on the overnight train, better departure times for New York nighttime event-goers, and additional daily service for Virginia.

Specifically, the current overnight train between Boston and Washington, DC, the *Night Owl*, will be relaunched with a new name, the *Twilight Shoreliner*. This train will feature a new Viewliner sleeping car, a first class lounge car, and a new and expanded schedule designed to better meet the needs of long-distance, overnight customers. The southbound train will leave Boston at 8:00 p.m., depart from New York at 1:30 a.m., arrive in Washington, DC at 6:15 a.m., and continue to Newport News, arriving at 10:50 a.m. NJ TRANSIT tickets will no longer be accepted on this train. The northbound train will leave from Newport News at 4:30 p.m., depart Washington, DC at 8:45 p.m., depart New York at 1:10 a.m., and arrive in Boston at 6:00 a.m. Mondays through Fridays and 6:10 a.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

Because of the earlier arrival of the new *Twilight Shoreliner*, morning commuters who now take the *Night Owl* into Boston may find that MBTA service from Providence will better meet their needs. Southbound commuters from Philadelphia will now have

a new train, the *Capitol Sunrise*, departing weekdays at 6:10 a.m. and arriving in Washington, DC at 8:10 a.m., making stops at Wilmington, Perryville (to receive MARC passengers only), Aberdeen, Baltimore, BWI Airport and New Carrollton.

The *Evening Metropolitan*, which departs Boston daily at 6:10 p.m., will terminate in Philadelphia instead of Washington Monday through Friday mornings at 1:00 a.m. The weekend schedule for this train remains unchanged. Train #198 will operate daily between Washington and New York, leaving Washington at 10:30 p.m., and arriving in New York at 2:10 a.m. MARC tickets will be accepted for this train in Washington, New Carrollton, BWI Airport, Baltimore and Aberdeen. Trains #75, #96 and #196 will be discontinued, as customers served on these trains will be accommodated on the *Twilight Shoreliner*.

On July 1 the new "Get the Inside Track" cards were available at New Haven. "Information" also had a revised NE timetable book for the asking. A look at the schedule for train 67 shows that it will sit in Philadelphia for one hour—from 3:05 to 4:05am. The old schedule had it sitting in Philly for 27mins.

An entire page (p. 11) of the new timetable book is devoted to a promotion of the TWILIGHT SHORELINER (formerly the NIGHT OWL). The train sports a Twilight Lounge available to Viewliner sleeper and Custom Class passengers only. The promotion also states: "Coach Class customers can relax in the train's roomy, reclining seats, with pillows and blankets for added comfort upon request." Do .I detect a little competition with the COAST STARLIGHT here? Will the coaches be "Amtwos's" and will the crews not turn the overhead lights on in the middle of the night? A future ride on this train hopefully will answer these questions.—Bob Underwood

●●●

CSX freight collision at Scary WV on June 7 caused the CARDINAL, train 50, to turn at Huntington to become train 51, and train 51 turned at Charleston to become #50. A bus bridge was set up to connect Huntington, Charleston and intermediate points. This situation continued until June 13, when through train service resumed.

VRE commuter coach has been operating between Washington DC and Danville VA on the CRESCENT, appearing in Amtrak's computer as trains 819 and 820. The car is switched at Washington and Atlanta, where Amtrak switches mail cars on and off the CRESCENT anyway. Space is sold in the commuter coach only between Washington and points within Virginia. Despite the lower-quality accommodations in the commuter coach, Amtrak's computer shows no difference in fare; however, yield-management programs seem to be applied to this train, as there are many dates when no coach space shows in the computer for travel within Virginia on trains 19 & 20, but only on 819 & 820.

The village of East Rochester NY will sponsor a special Amtrak train on Aug 2 to celebrate East Rochester's centenary. The train will use Amcoaches and a cafe. The train will lv Rochester at 9:30am and arrive at Albany NY at about 1:15pm. Buses there then pick up passengers for a tour of the state capital and an evening dinner cruise on the Hudson River. The train will arrive back in Rochester at about 11pm. The trip is open to the public, and the price of $100 per person includes all transportation plus dinner on the river cruise. For info or to order, call the Village of East Rochester at 716-586-3553.

Northbound CSX freight train of flatcars with trailers derailed about 6pm on July 8 between the 14th St bridge and Crystal City just south of Washington DC, sideswiping a southbound Amtrak train (the VIRGINIAN). The last two cars of the Amtrak train separated from the first four, but did not derail. There were three apparently minor injuries to Amtrak employees on the train, one of them an off-duty employee. Virginia Railway Express service on the line was disrupted, and Amtrak said there would be delays to its trains through the next morning.

Metro-North has new timetables in effect June 30-Aug 17 because of an ongoing concrete tie installation program. The first phase of the project, between Poughkeepsie and Beacon, was expected to be complete by the end of June, and then the line between Beacon and Garrison stations was to start getting the new ties. Also, welded rail installation was to start then on the Harlem Line between Katohan and Chappaqua stations.

The timetables were to show increased service on the Dover Plains branch, with added weekend summer trains, giving service in and out of Grand Central every two hours. And the Saturday-only 10:57pm train from Grand Central was changed to leave at 11:49pm.

Metro-North said that for the week ended July 6 its systemwide on-time performance was 97.0%. Year to date it was 96.7. The goal for the year is still 96.5%.

That same week marked the start of M-N's Guaranteed Ride Home Program, available to Uniticket customers who ride the Tappan ZEExpress bus to the Tarrytown station and commute to Grand Central. M-N provides them with two free taxi rides per month to their home or car from the station when ZEExpress service is not scheduled to meet a train. The unique program is funded by the state and the US DOT and is designed for customers who work late at the office in NYC, stay late with friends after work, or must rush home midday because of an emergency. M-N says that no cash is involved—the program operates on a voucher system.

Shore Line East issued a new timetable effective June 30, with train times unchanged. The cover pictures four clamshells and the rear panel carries for the first time ads for local businesses.

A TV editorial in favor of the proposed $450 million Griffin Line, a light rail commuter line linking Hartford CT and Bradley International Airport, was aired July 1 and 2 on New Haven's WFSB. Quote: "The DOT, also known for its devotion to highways, and an administration unwilling to look beyond the Governor's anticipated second term, are being terribly shortsighted."

Some movement is belatedly seen in the plan to build a new Amtrak station at the old Post Office at 33rd St & Eighth Avenue in Manhattan (the Farley project). After disagreements and a 1.5-year delay, the $315 million project will start soon with new passenger platforms being built under the 84-year old building (NY Times).

The Washington Metro opened its long-anticipated Franconia-Springfield station June 29. It is the terminus of the Blue Line and the 20th station planned for Virginia.

Surprising environmentalists, President Clinton June 25 gave his support to stronger air pollution requirements. The American Petroleum Institute immediately criticized Clinton's stance. The new rules will among other things lead to a greater push for public transit.

NARP said that transit did very well in the transportation appropriations bill in the Senate, getting $4.8 billion, up from $4.4 billion for the current year.

MIDWEST REPORT

The Chicago CTA is phasing out conductors on its trains. June 23, conductors were eliminated from Green Line (Lake/Engle-wood) and Purple Line (Evanston Express) trains. These trains now operate with motormen (re-named operators) only. Previously the conductor rode midtrain, made (generally unintelligible) station announcements, operated the doors and checked that everyone was on board before closing them. Now the operator will perform these functions in addition to running the train. This fall, CTA will eliminate operators from Red Line (Howard/Dan Ryan) and Blue Line (O'Hare/Congress Park/Douglas Park) trains, saving a total of $13.8 million in 1998. The Skokie Swift and Orange Line (Midway Airport) have been one-person operations since they started, and conductors were eliminated on Brown Line (Ravenswood) trains in 1995. Because operators will need to leave the control cab and look out the opposite side of the train to make sure doors are clear before closing them, the result of this change will be slower train service.

On the weekend of June 14-15, CTA began selling its new Transit Cards to users. Similar to tickets used on Metra Electric, the Washington DC Metro and many other systems, these cards are passed by the customer through a magnetic reader, which deducts the $1.50 cost for a ride and returns them. When depleted, the value of the cards can be increased by feeding money into a transit card vending machine. While CTA will continue to accept cash, tokens and monthly passes, the agency is strongly encouraging customers to use the new system by discounting the cards. Buyers of $13.50 cards get $15 worth of rides, while buyers of $16.50 cards get $18 worth of service (10 rides and 10 transfers). Eventually the cards will be usable on buses as well. Installation of readers will continue throughout the rail system during the summer.

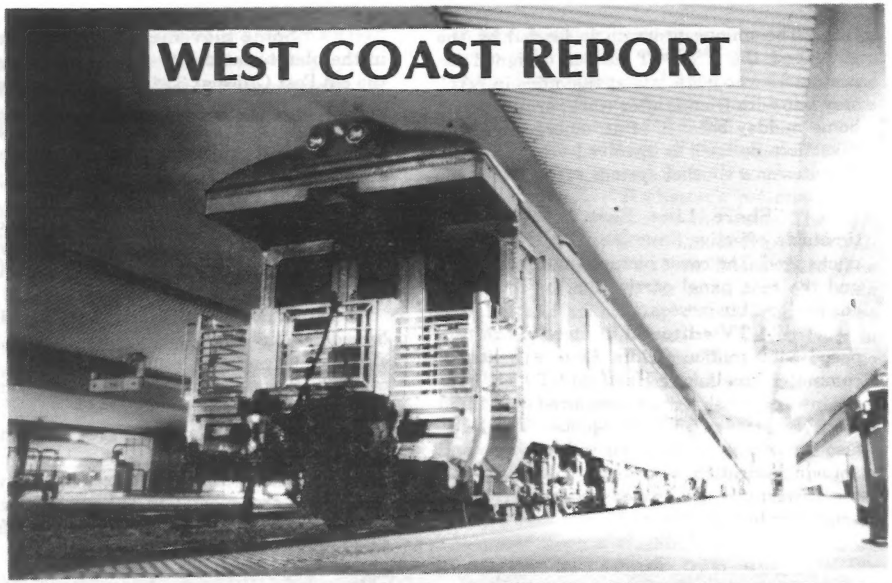
CTA has announced plans to eliminate 15 bus routes—10 starting in 1998 and the rest when alternate public transit arrangements are developed for affected areas. The agency hopes to save $24.8 million annually by dropping the routes, the most heavily-used of which serves less than 2000 daily riders.

The CTA opened its new Harold Washington Library Center June 17 on the Loop at State & Van Buren. The $13 million facility, which boasts a trainshed and brick-enclosed elevators and escalators, serves the Brown, Orange and Purple Lines.—Mike Blaszak.

The IC3 Flexliner the first week of July ran several trips in Minnesota, with stops at St. Cloud, Anoka, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Hastings.

The Cleveland RTA opened its new Windermere station for the Windermere Red Line Rapid service June 22. Renovation of the 45-year old station will be finished by fall.

WEST COAST REPORT



Union Pacific business car SP 150 "Sunset", still lettered "Southern Pacific", on the rear of train 2, the SUNSET LIMITED/TEXAS EAGLE, at Los Angeles on Apr 4. Photo by Gene Poon.

A minor delay will occur in the mechanism by which the CAPITOL trains are taken over by a joint powers board made up of reps from eight counties that the trains serve. According to a June 30 report, a signed agreement that was due July 1 must be delayed because of legislative technicalities that must be worked out. There is no serious disagreement, only some red tape that must be dealt with. Correcting legislation had to be passed, and then the new board will have 45 days in which to prepare for taking over the trains, which will be managed by BART.

Cloverdale Celebrity Wine Train on the Northwestern Pacific RR, scheduled for June 28, was postponed until July 26 due to the need to make rail repairs. However, there is no assurance that they will be made by the new date, as the railroad lacks funds to purchase ties and rails or pay for installation. A grant the NWP received for track repairs applies only to the portion from Larkspur to Healdsburg CA.

Portland's MAX system is now up to 31,500 riders per weekday, an increase of over 50% from its 1986 startup.

The CASCADIA train was saved from discontinuance at the eleventh hour by action of the Oregon legislature. The Oregon DOT announced July 7 that "This has averted a shutdown of services in Oregon's Willamette Valley which would have occurred at 8pm today." The DOT continued, "The CASCADIA train and Thruway buses will continue to operate current Amtrak schedules between Eugene and Portland until further notice."

BNSF is re-activating some freight tracks in Riverbank CA to serve a new tenant at a previously-closed Army munitions depot. Home owners in two subdivisions near the plant are up in arms because they say they were told by the developers that the tracks were abandoned and would never be used again. Liquid propane will reportedly be hauled on the freight line, sometimes only a few feet from the residential properties.

A Santa Rosa, CA newspaper, the Press Democrat, reported June 22 the results of a poll it took. The poll showed strong support for a rail line connecting cities in Marin and Sonoma Counties, and also support for a proposed half-cent sales tax to fund the rail line and highway 101 expansion.

Fireworks by transit: On July 4 your editor traveled to San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf to view the annual fireworks sponsored by the SF Chronicle. Here is his report:

Leaving from North Berkeley BART, I had a small dinner at a Market St cafe near a San Francisco Muni #30 Stockton St trolley bus stop. There was a 20-min wait for a bus, which soon became extremely jammed with standees heading for the Wharf. Tourists on the bus complained they were late for a restaurant reservation and couldn't determine where to get off, as streets were not called out or any other information given.

The fireworks were magnificent—perhaps the best I'd ever seen. They were actually enhanced by fog blowing in through the Golden Gate, as the higher fireworks would explode within a clump of fog, illuminating it in a huge, misty glow.

The display lasted from 9:30 to 10. At the conclusion, the massive crowd headed back towards downtown. With most of the crowd, I made a half-hour walk back to Market St. At the Embarcadero BART station, the jam-up of entering pedestrians was unbelievable. It was wall-to-wall sardines. However, when a train arrived, most of the crowd seemed to fit in it, though still jammed shoulder to shoulder.

Service was on a Sunday schedule, so at night there are no Fremont or Richmond trains from SF, and transfers must be made in Oakland. Before the recent opening of the Pleasanton station, there was only the Pittsburg/Bay Point line running out of SF on such occasions, but now there is also the Dublin/Pleasanton line, which covers half of the Fremont line before it branches off to Pleasanton. The first train that arrived was a Pleasanton train, and the operator gave the crowd wrong instructions for transferring. Her announcement, heard in the station as the train arrived, was that passengers for Pittsburg/Bay Point should board and transfer at West Oakland to a Pittsburg/Bay Point train. Actually, they should have remained at Embarcadero to await such a train. Then after the train was underway, she announced that Passengers for the Richmond line should get off at 12th St Oakland and transfer to a Richmond train. In actuality, her train does not serve 12th St, but bypasses it, making Lake Merritt the first stop for Richmond transfers. People who knew the system well could figure out the correct actions to take, but many on board were probably unfamiliar with such BART transfers.

Once again on a major movement of people on a major holiday, both BART and Muni were relatively unprepared to handle the crowds in a fashion efficient and comfortable to them. —Jim Russell.

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In Portland OR on July 8 an auto traveling on the Broadway overpass, which runs over the Portland terminal tracks, swerved out of control (excessive speed, said the Portland police) and drove through the guard rails, landing on top of Amtrak train 28, the EMPIRE BUILDER, on track 2. The auto wound up on Superliner coach 34092 and on new Amtrak Express boxcar 70009, which was on adjacent track 1. Amtrak personnel removed the two occupants of the Superliner car, who had only minor injuries. Later, rescuers lowered ladders from the overpass onto the roof of the coach to remove the auto's driver and passenger. The accident, at about 2:15pm, necessitated the removal of the coach from the train, which left only 15mins late. The coach, which suffered minor damage, will be returned to Beech Grove on its own wheels for repair. The car, a Ford Thunderbird, will go to the great bird nest in the sky.—Gene Poon.

Three new LRVs in San Francisco were involved in an accident at 7am June 23 that destroyed one of them. A new $2.2 million Breda car was totaled during an attempt to tow a disabled LRV with two others on a curving, hilly stretch of track at 18th and Church Streets. When the set of cars would not make the grade, the operator backed them down and attempted the grade at a higher speed. This caused a whiplash effect that made the middle car break away and hit a brand new handicapped platform (unoccupied), demolishing it. A second car broke its coupler and hit a power pole. Three Muni employees were treated at a hospital, but there were no other injuries. The J-Church line was closed down for the day and buses substituted. It was the same location where last December a towed car separated from its mate, rolled down the hill, hit parked autos and overturned. After the present accident, Muni said it would halt the practice of towing disabled cars up this particular grade.

The US DOT on June 20 signed a grant to give Sacramento CA $111.2 million for a 6.3-mile light rail extension from downtown Sacramento to Meadowview Road.

Trying to beat a Metrolink train to a crossing, a man in Covina CA June 25 was killed instantly by a San Bernardino to L.A. train at 8:15am. It was the first motorist fatality this year for Metrolink, though four pedestrians have been fatalities. On July 1 at Baldwin Park at 5:30pm a big rig lost control and rolled down an embankment onto tracks of the same line. The driver, slightly injured, was pulled from his cab before a San Bernardino-bound train hit the rig, derailing the engine. There were no other injuries. Passengers were served lemonade in a nearby cafe while they awaited another train.

Los Angeles transit workers July 13 agreed to a 3-yr labor contract, ending the threat of a strike. On June 29 MTA began increased bus service, with more vehicles and route changes, the result of a recent federal court order to reduce numbers of standees.

The BART strike threat was ended when Gov. Wilson requested a 60-day cooling off period, which ends Sep 6.

Green Amtrak boxcar #70000 has been touring the system for crew-training purposes. It was in the SF Bay Area June 30 and left on the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR, train 6, on July 1.

Caltrain announced June 30 that it has a new logo, shown here. It is no longer "CalTrain", but "Caltrain". Also announced was a 10% increase in service. The news was disseminated via a five-city whistle stop train dubbed the 21st CENTURY UNLIMITED. Caltrain board members and local dignitaries also heralded the value of the oldest commuter rail line west of the Mississippi and noted the significant improvements made over the past five years. The promo train ran from the San Francisco station and made stops at Bay Meadows (San Mateo), Mountain View, Tamien (San Jose) and Gilroy.

It was announced that Caltrain will add six trains to its 60-train weekday schedule and two trains on Saturday, effective July 7. Caltrain also celebrated its ridership increases noting that since the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board, a 3-county local agency, took over Caltrain in July 1992 (five years ago), ridership has increased over 18%, from about 20,500 weekday riders to 25,000. Last year Caltrain reached an annual ridership of 7.4 million for the highest since 1958. Preliminary figures for fiscal 1996-7 indicate it will top the 8 million mark, Caltrain said.

Caltrain said the new logo will strengthen its identity, noting that the red circle incorporated in the design is similar to the former Southern Pacific logo, reflecting the rail system's rich history.

In coming months, Caltrain will begin more improvements, including adding a new station in Mountain View and renovating its San Francisco terminal at 4th & Townsend. It will also start replacing track between San Jose and Sunnyvale.

"Commuter rail service along the Peninsula has been going strong for 133 years," said Caltrain Executive Director Gerald T. Haugh. "However, we've done more to improve it in the past five years than had been done in the previous 128."

Caltrain said that in changing its logo, it considered adding another word to "CalTrain" in part to avoid confusion with "Caltrans". However, in focus groups it was concluded that a better word addition could not be found. The previous CalTrain logo was in teal and blue, Caltrans colors. The new one used red, black and white. The changeover will be made gradually. Caltrain said it also will revamp its timetables into easier to use formats. Schedule and fare info will be in one pocket-sized piece and general system info in another.

In changing schedules, Caltrain is moving its 10pm San Jose departure to 10:30 to give it a more consistent departure after San Jose Sharks hockey games. Previously, it held the train until 15mins after game time to accommodate hundreds of sports fans, often leaving at 10:30 and inconveniencing waiting passengers up the line.

The CalTrain board after an April public hearing approved a 5% across-the-board fare increase, and raised the cost of its Weekend Pass from $8 to $9. The change was effective July 6.

SEATTLE TO VANCOUVER

By Walt Stringer

In RTN 568 I reported on my trip on the last westbound PIONEER, from Boise to Seattle, leaving Boise May 10. The remainder of my trip was from Seattle to Vancouver BC via the Sunday morning MT. BAKER Talgo, with a Thruway bus return, and a ride on the WEST COAST EXPRESS commuter rail of Vancouver Monday morning.

The Talgo was pulled by F40 engine 318 and was nearly full. The food was outstanding, the train chief very informative, and of course there was great scenery. This Talgo was the first set, with the green interior (the "green cocoon") with two-and-one seating.

At Seattle I counted six private cars, and in Vancouver the CANADIAN had car "Glacier Park" on the rear, with Skyliners 8500 and 8509 in the consist. I also noted the damaged RDC 6104 in the yard.

We had small delays due to havey boardings, and sat near the BN Fraser River bridge for 10mins due to a CN freight. We backed into Vancouver, and Customs was polite and quick. At Everett we used the upper level and joined the Vancouver line east of downtown.

The WEST COAST EXPRESS is well-used, with 4-7-car trains, and it has a coffee bar (one per train) on the lower level!

Riding the Seminole Gulf Dinner Train

By Jack M. Turner

Southwest Florida has long been a playground for Northern snowbirds desiring to escape the rigors of winter. The allure of swaying palms, sunswept beaches, and balmy nights has led many people to establish winter residence in the communities of Naples and Fort Myers. In the summer both were historically modestly populated little burgs while winter transformed both into havens for the well-heeled Northerner.

Many of these winter visitors arrived by train, with the Atlantic Coast Line's *West Coast Champion* carrying many a tourist to the region. Service continued after the merger of the ACL into Seaboard Coast Line Railroad and lasted until the formation of Amtrak in May 1971.

The passage of time has seen both Naples and Fort Myers grow exponentially in keeping with the overall growth of Florida's population. While both cities still boast a notable swelling of the population in winter, the term *sleepy community* no longer is an accurate description of summer in Southwest Florida.

For over 19 years the rail lines of Southwest Florida hosted only freight trains until December 1990 when the Seminole Gulf Railway Dinner Train made its first run between North Naples and Fort Myers. Seminole Gulf had purchased trackage from Arcadia to North Naples three years earlier from the CSX Corporation, successor to the SCL. Eventually the dinner train's base was shifted to Fort Myers, from which the train operated northward toward Punta Gorda. Regularly scheduled excursion trains, meanwhile, were added between Fort Myers and Bonita Springs, just north of Naples.

Step Aboard The Dinner Train

Today's Seminole Gulf Dinner Train is a pleasant success story that blends delicious cuisine, intriguing theater presentations, and nostalgic railroading into one evening. Through the expert guidance of owners Susan and Gordon Fay and a host of staff members, the dinner train has evolved into one of the region's premier tourist attractions.

A brief shower falls as we wait to board the dinner train on a warm Florida evening. The four car train has just backed into the station, which is housed in a neat modular building behind the Metro Mall. The train is sold out on this Saturday night, which seems to be a regular occurrence.

Our names are checked off the reservation list and we are assigned Table 4 in the *Marco, a* stainless silver dining car named for nearby Marco Island. This car has 24 seats in the dining section arranged in groups of four per table. The walls are decorated with dark blue wallpaper, and window treatments wear a coordinated pattern. Each table is neatly set with a candleholder that resembles a seashell. Light fixtures on the walls also are shaped like seashells.

Shortly after 6:30p.m. we are on our way northward, first passing a typical South Florida canal and a series of condominiums then easing past the Seminole Gulf rail yards. It is obvious that this train will break no speed records but, then, that is not the objective of tonight's journey. After about 10 minutes we pass a wye that once carried ACL passengers to the downtown Fort Myers depot.

A the sun peaks out from behind the rain clouds, we emerge from our urban path into a tranquil setting where the railway crosses the wide Caloosahatchee River. The river crossing is not only the highlight of the dinner train route, but is undoubtedly one of

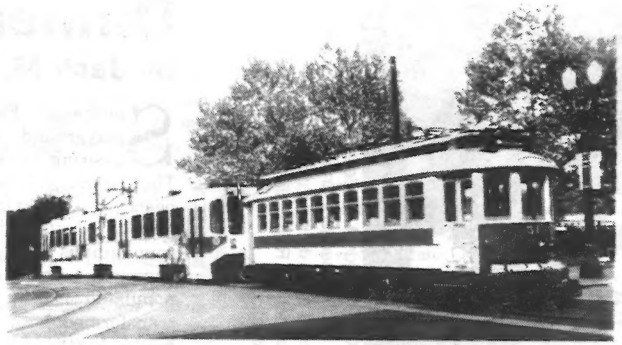
(continued on page 14)

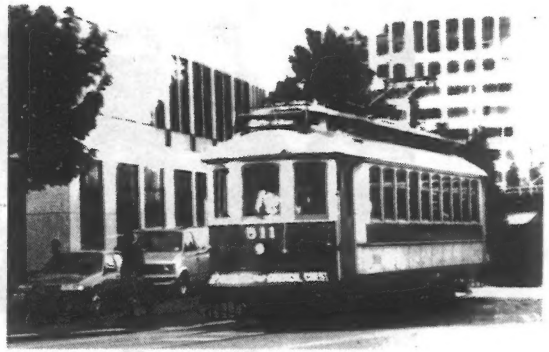
The Seminole Gulf Railway Dinner Train prepares to leave the Metro Mall station in Fort Myers on a 35-mile round trip.

Ex-B&O and C&O GP9s provide push-pull power. Photos by the author.

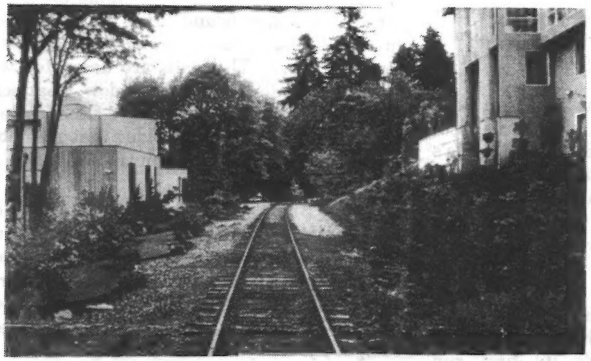
Streetcars Galore in Portland, Ore.

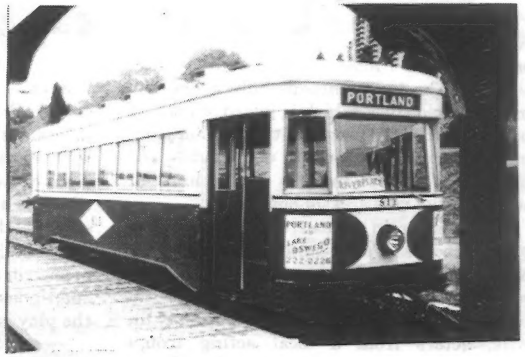
Photo essay by Don Scott



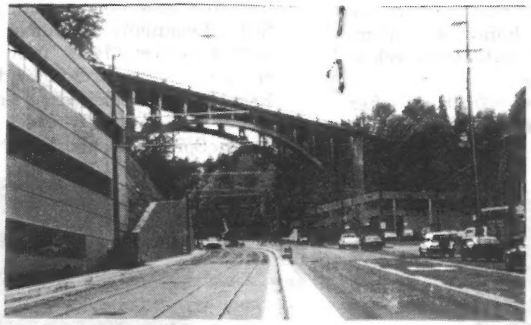


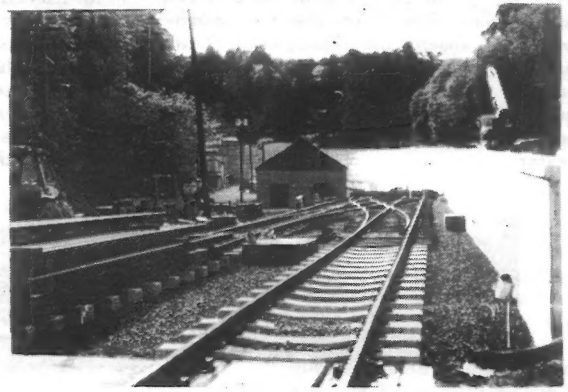
Above: MAX streetcars, their sides covered with ads, meet in downtown Portland. Center: A MAX LRV tows a disabled Gomaco-built antique streetcar replica. Right: Gomaco car 511 downtown.





Above: Views along the lush and scenic Willamette Shore Railway, connecting Portland and suburban Lake Oswego. Right: At a new station at Riverplace, where the line was extended in April. Cars operate from current from towed generators.

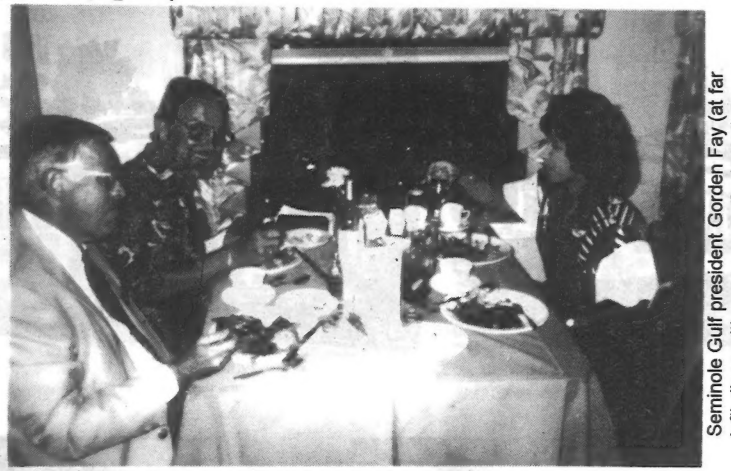




Above: English double-decker no. 48 meets Portland Peter Witt car 813 (same car as in middle right photo on page 13). Center and right: Scenes of construction of the MAX West Side line. Service to 18th & Salmon will begin Aug 31, with full line to suburban Hillsboro opening in Sep 1998.

Seminole Gulf Dinner Train

(continued from page 11)



Seminole Gulf president Gorden Fay (at far left) dines with passengers Craig and Cindy Bassett aboard dining car "Gasparilla", former RF&P sleeper "King William".

Florida's three most scenic rail water crossings. The trestle stands only a few feet from the placid river, which is guarded on both shores by stands of mangrove trees. Fish jump from the water right beneath our window and boaters are seen plying the water in their motorboats, jet skis and sailboats.

The train pauses on the trestle as the first course, a steaming cup of clam chowder, is served. The setting sun makes for a beautiful scene out the left hand side of the train. During our 20 minute stop on the trestle, actors from a local acting troupe perform the first act of *Three Strikes, You're Dead,* a murder mystery based on a story developed by Robert H. Fay of the Seminole Gulf Railway. Diners are asked to imagine themselves aboard the Chicago to Florida *Dixie Flyer* in the 1920s; this is the setting for the story we are watching. Productions are changed frequently and a loyal clientele visits the dinner train much as it would any popular theater.

We resume our northward journey at 7:30p.m. and soon cross the bridge's draw span. Before long were are running beside Interstate 75 which links the upper Midwest with Florida. As darkness falls shortly after eight o'clock, we reach our northernmost point which is adjacent to milepost 950. During our stop at this remote scenic spot we enjoy a delicious Florida fruit cup followed by roasted prime rib accompanied by fettuccine and sugar snap peas. While we dine, the second act of the play is presented.

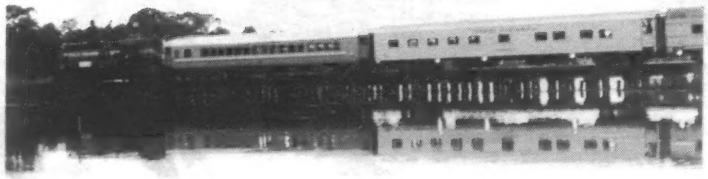
Soon the engineer walks through the train to reach the GP9 that has brought up the rear of the train from Fort Myers and will be in the lead on our return run. The marshlands outside our window suddenly are illuminated by floodlights mounted on the sides of our former Southern Railway dining car. Moments later we depart on the southbound trek to Fort Myers.

The trip ends at 10:30p.m. after dessert and the performance of the final act of the play in which the who-done-it is revealed. Our trip has covered approximately 35 miles and taken us on a most enjoyable journey through time.

Throughout the year there are a variety of trips designed to suit the tastes of Seminole Gulf's clientele. A jazz train runs on Thursday nights complete with live music and an a la carte dinner menu. Murder mystery trips operate on Friday and Saturday nights while a shorter dinner trip operates at twilight on Sundays minus the theater production. On selected dates noontime luncheon trains operate between Fort Myers and the Caloosahatchee River.

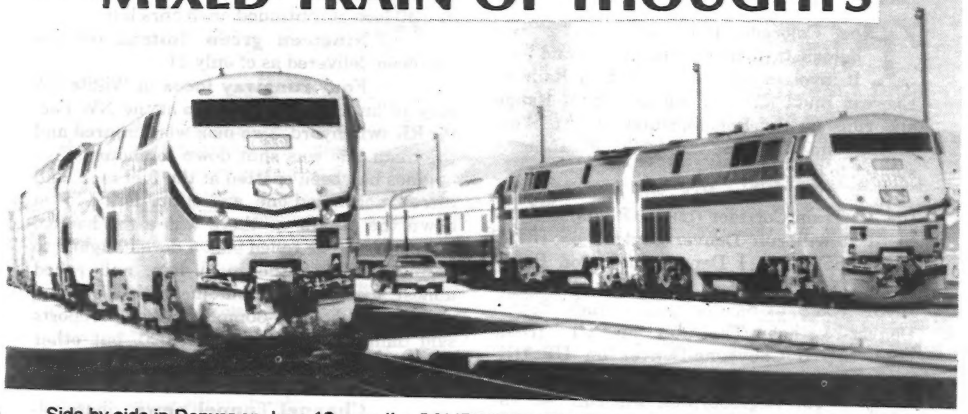
A highlight of the Christmas holidays is Seminole Gulf s trip from Fort Myers to Punta Gorda, where passengers board boats that traverse that city's canals to view festive Christmas light displays. Dinner is then served on the return trip to Fort Myers. These trips have become exceedingly popular and usually require reservations well in advance. In addition, special holiday theme trains are operated on New Year's, Valentine's Day, Easter Sunday, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Thanksgiving. Excursion trains, meanwhile, operate on a regular schedule southward from Fort Myers to Bonita Springs. These consist of rail diesel cars pulled by a GP9 locomotive.

The best time to visit Southwest Florida is in the summer when lodging rates are at their lowest. The closest hotel is the Courtyard by Marriott which is across the street from the Metro Mall. Fort Myers is close to some of Florida's most beautiful beaches, Sanibel Island and Marco Island. Amtrak Thruway bus service connects Fort Myers with points north three times daily via Tampa and Orlando. Reservations and information about Seminole Gulf Railway's trains may be obtained by calling (800)SEM-GULF or (941)275-8487.



The Caloosahatchee River near Tice FL reflects the dinner train during its sunset break on former Atlantic Coast Line trackage.

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS



Side by side in Denver on June 12 were the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR, train 5 (left) and the AMERICAN ORIENT EXPRESS. Train 5 is led by units 830 and 44, and full-length Heritage dome lounge 9302 is deadheading behind the two engines. The AOE has engine 80 on the point. Photo by Bill Hakkarinen. (The AOE is offering 3-day trips through the Rockies, starting in Denver, with air travel to Denver included. The Rockies trips are offered only through Aug 7. Info is available from Amtrak Vacations at 1-800-321-8684 or from travel agents.)

Amtrak has a new telephone menu system in the Washington DC area for its 800 number. One of the menu choices is to receive information about the status of trains. You are asked for the number of the train, the day, the city and state where it will arrive. If the train is running on time, or nearly on time, the system tells you so. If the train is seriously delayed, it refers you to an agent who tells you when the train left the last staffed station. Even if the train is on time, the computer-generated message advises you to check on the train's progress an hour before it is scheduled to arrive or depart in your selected city. Having this semi-automated train status info system should make it easier for passengers to obtain up-to-date information on Amtrak arrivals and departures.—Rudy Volin.

Splendid PBS program seen in the Bay Area July 3 was a travelogue about Amtrak's ADIRONDACK, in a program titled "Scenic Rail Journeys of America". Presum-

ably it's one of a series. The hour-long program was sponsored in part by Amtrak's COAST STARLIGHT, so there was a brief commercial for that train at the beginning and end of the hour. The program included on-board, aerial, trackside and camera-on-the-front-of-engine photography, and stopovers at many points along the line with engaging highlights of each location from a tourist's perspective. There were interviews with crew and passengers, all of them praising the joys of train riding. One conductor mentioned that the route has been called one of the ten most scenic train rides of North America. Editor Jim Russell was impressed to hear that, until he remembered that he had said it, in Ecotraveler magazine a few years ago—an opinion coming full circle.

If you see the broadcast. note that there are several different equipment sets included interchangeably in the film: Amfleet and Heritage trainsets, and one with a private heavyweight car on the train's rear.

Coming up here July 17 is a program on the Alaska Railroad.

The Colorado DOT will run a rail demonstration program in Aug and Sep. It involves runs of two Trinity Railway Express Budd RDCs along the Front Range and runs by the RegioSprinter on the West Slope. The following schedule of runs is subject to change:

The Trinity RDC will run Aug 28 on the Air Train Corridor (UP—KP line). Aug 29 to 31 it will run Denver-Boulder on BNSF (C&S line) . Sep 1 Denver-Pueblo on BNSF and UP joint line. Sep 2-4 Denver-Golden on BNSF (C&S ex-narrow gauge line). Sep 5 Denver-Northglen/Thornton on UP (Dent line). Sep 6 Cheyenne-Denver on UP (DP line).

The RegioSprinter will run Sep 19-22 Glenwood Springs-Carbondale (Roaring Fork) and Sep 23-26 Craig-Steamboat on UP (ex-D&SL).

ColoRail is selling tickets at $69 each for the Denver-Pueblo Sep 1 round trip.

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The Texas Eagle northbound derailed its rear cars at Little Rock early on July 11. There was one minor crew injury. After a delay, the front cars continued on to Chicago.

An Amtrak official has admitted that the daily operation of the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR has not yielded the passenger loadings that had been expected. The train now carries three sleepers, diner, lounge and four coaches. Loadings are up from last year, when the train ran four days a week, but the added capacity (50% more sleeper space, 25% more coach, plus daily operation instead of quad-weekly) is not being sold at anticipated levels. On some days, the lowest-tier coach fares have been available, even in summer. Amtrak is reportedly considering fare reductions and/or promotions, including an increase in the number of sleeper rooms priced in the mid-range accommodation charge instead of the full rate usually found in summer.

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More info on the TEXAS EAGLE derailment of July 11: lounge car 33040 split a switch and the three next coaches, 34051, 34066 and 31543 (smoker) also derailed. The rest of the train left after a 3hr, 11min delay. The train had been 2hrs, 28mins late into Little Rock already. There was little damage beyond the car wheels. The cause appeared to be a defective switch. The incident also delayed train 21 by 1hr, 20mins.

The Cascadia, train 751 on July 10 struck debris placed on the track by vandals and it limped into Salem OR. After repairs to its F40 loco, it continued on, 3.5hrs late.

Nineteen green Amtrak boxcars had been delivered as of July 11.

Four runaway locos in Willits CA July 10 hit a fifth parked loco at the NW Pacific RR switchyard. Two men were injured and the main line was shut down for hours. Five engines had been spotted at the fuel rack, and a crew uncoupled one, and either failed to tie down the others, or there was a mechanical failure. The four rolled past a derail aligned to permit entry to the main line, and rolled almost a mile north, colliding with a stationary unit at about 20-30mph. Published reports said damage was about $100,000, but other analysts said that figure was much too low. Frames of several units were bent.

Channel Tunnel news: Shareholders at a Paris meeting July 10 okayed a plan to restructure debt, avoiding bankruptcy for the tunnel operator. On July 1 France and Britain agreed to extend the concession of the operator from 2052 to 2086. On July 9 it was confirmed that a plan to run overnight luxury sleeper trains from Scotland, Manchester, Wales and the West Country to Paris, using the tunnel, was abandoned. However, Eurostar daytime service from those regions will be starting later in 1997. Work is moving forward on a tunnel to speed service out of London. It should be opening by 2003.

Salt Lake City paper reported that the Little America hotel in SLC, site of the NRHS annual meeting in late June, belongs to a business consortium that opposes light rail construction in Salt Lake City.

Heritage sleeping cars' last scheduled operation on Amtrak was June 22-23, on the NIGHT OWL. Train 67 had car 2463 "Silver Dale" (an ex-Burlington car) Boston to Washington. Train 66 had car 2431 "Pacific Forum" (ex-UP) Washington to Boston. Although the timetable called for train 67 to arrive at Washington at 8:05am, five minutes later than train 66 in Boston, on that date train 66 ran 30mins late, arriving in Boston South Station at 8:30am; so car 2431 "Pacific Forum" was the last Heritage fleet sleeper in scheduled revenue service on Amtrak.

After the schedule dust is all settled, the consist of the TEXAS EAGLE is finally at its scheduled eight cars: baggage, two sleepers, diner, lounge, coach-smoker and two coaches. A varying number of mail/express cars is added, usually to the rear of the train. However, Amtrak says they will review consist and loadings, and make adjustment as needed. The recent restructuring of sleeper fares to offpeak levels instead of full peak season rates seems to indicate that the train is not doing as well as expected, and may confirm how much passenger loading is lost with the discontinuance of the through Los Angeles cars.

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An Amtrak engineer from Los Angeles wrote the following letter, which was, rather surprisingly, printed in the June issue of Amtrak's employee newsletter, *Amtrak Ties*. The engineer's name was withheld:

"Does this sound familiar? In the 1960s, the railroads wanted to divest themselves of 'the honorable burden' of running passenger trains. So they went about it by methodically downgrading the service so that nobody in their right minds would ride these once gleaming silver streaks.

"The same applies to the demise of the DESERT WIND. First, the train was made a no-smoking train. (Even if you're a militant non-smoker, you must know that 90% of all Vegas-bound travelers are smokers.) This ensured a definite drop in ridership. Second, the food service was downgraded to lounge car service only, with plastic trays filled with microwave, barely edible 'food'. That pretty much took care of the first-class folks. Third, the DESERT WIND was made a tri-weekly train, with departures only on days that not even a gambling addict could use. Fourth, five more cars were added to the train. Anyone with a calculator can figure out that 200 people on an eight- or nine-car train leaves a lot to be desired. So, Amtrak could now show an even greater drop in ridership. Voilà! A losing train!

"I am not alone in my theories. Most of the crew base in Los Angeles, if asked, will tell you that they, too, feel that the DESERT WIND was the victim of a concerted effort by Amtrak to bring about its death. In all the time the DESERT WIND was running, not one of us heard one radio spot, saw one TV spot, or read one magazine ad extolling the virtues of taking the train to Las Vegas. Where were the Amtrak marketing geniuses? How can we keep our heads held high and have pride in our company when high-salaried marketing and advertising executives can't even come up with a way to get people to ride to the world's entertainment capital?"

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TEXAS EAGLE SLEEPER fare restructuring mentioned in the column at left happened as follows: On June 25 Amtrak revised the availability of sleeper space on the train. Whereas all rooms had been priced at the highest accommodations charge level, the change placed all rooms at the middle level, effectively reducing the price of sleeping accommodations. This resulted in the accommodations charge for a Chicago-San Antonio standard bedroom decreasing from $238 to $178; a deluxe room from $477 to $358; a special bedroom from $301 to $227; and a family bedroom from $414 to $292. All accommodations still include full meals in the diner and are additional to the rail (coach) fare, but purchasing the accommodations automatically qualifies the passenger for the lowest published rail fare, whether it is available for sale in the coaches or not.

The CAPITOL LIMITED schedule for train 30 has been adjusted to an arrival time in Washington DC of 2pm. It had been at 1:47pm. The schedule change appeared in Amtrak's Arrow computer system for the effective arrival date of June 24. The first train to operate on the new schedule was train 30 that left Chicago June 23. No change was made to train 29's schedule. All the added time is in the last segment of the trip, between Rockville MD and Washington DC.

The COAST STARLIGHT, train 11, operating through California on June 22, was delayed about 13 hours due to a damaged bridge on the former SP Shasta Line.

Special summer offer on the EMPIRE BUILDER was advertised apparently in a limited fashion, with sales ending June 30 for travel July 10 through Aug 27. Under the deal, a companion would ride free when accompanied by one full-fare adult. The offer was not valid over the July Fourth weekend, and had other restrictions.

As we go to press, House and Senate conferees are set to meet over the budget reconciliation bill. The Senate version contains the Amtrak half-cent of gas tax, while the House's doesn't. It's critical that the half-cent be included in the final version.

NARP said the full House Appropriations Committee approved the 1998 transportation funding bill July 11. It had been approved June 24 by the Transportation Committee. But Frank Wolf's Transportation subcommittee, unfortunately, had cut $60 million from the funds Amtrak needs for mandatory payments. Thus the $60 million must come from operations funds, and that would leave Amtrak desperately short and "sink the whole national system no matter what happens with the half cent" (words of NARP).

NARP explained the cut: "The Wolf subcommittee made this change based on a selective reading of a letter to Railroad Subcommittee chairwoman Susan Molinari from the Office of Management & Budget. The letter said that one way to define excess mandatory payments results in the $82 million approved by Wolf, but that the Administration still supported its original request for $142 million. Everyone agrees that Amtrak must pay the full $142 million, but Wolf did not add $60 million to operations when he knocked it out of mandatory payments".

Thus the $60 million must be restored, the half cent must be included in the reconciliation bill, and an Amtrak reauthorization bill must be passed this summer.

Said NARP, "Indeed, Amtrak's managers don't even know how they would deal with the $43 million gap between the Clinton and Amtrak operating grant requests, much less an additional shortfall of $60 million".

When the full Senate voted June 27 to include the Amtrak half-cent in the revenue reconciliation bill, Sen. McCain (R-AZ) tried to strike the half-cent, but the vote was 77 yes, 21 nays and 2 not voting, to retain it.

The Senate Transportation Subcom chaired by Richard Shelby of AL was to take up the 1998 funding bill on July 15. Shelby was one of the 21 to vote against the half-cent.

Former Amtrak President Paul Reistrup was named VP-Passenger Integration for CSX, effective July 1.

Some Amfleet cars subbed for regular Cal cars in a pinch in late June on the SAN JOAQUINS & CAPITOLS. They were in Oakland for a "Dunsmuir Daylight" special.

News in this issue is updated through July 16.

RAIL CANADA

BC Rail has initiated PACIFIC STARLIGHT dinner train runs between North Vancouver and Porteau Cove. Using Spirit of Washington Dinner Train equipment, including three domes, the train runs five times weekly and charges $69 (salon) and $84 (dome) for dinner runs.

The Tortillard du St. Laurent went bankrupt last year due to slow running time, an overlong season and dissension among directors. This year, Le P'tit Train de Charlevoix has the run, using more powerful engines, a shorter season and a 40-min cut in running time Quebec-Murray Bay. Off-season, trips will run Montreal to White Mts of NH.

An 80-year-old tradition ended at 5pm June 1 when ferry service between Cape Tormentine NB and Borden PEI was replaced by a new bridge.

The Chelsea-Wakefield, Que. steam train is being supplemented by a 65-passenger ferry run by Ottawa River Boat Co. The trip will be sold as a train-boat package.

A new Montreal to Blainville suburban train on CP is starting out well, with 700 riders per day. Service began May 12.

Eighty GO single-deck coaches, bought by the Quebec Ministry of Transport, are sitting idle at the GEC Alsthom Shops in Montreal. —Transport 2000.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"We're planning to drive from Babb MT, at Glacier National Park [east side of park] to Seattle in one day. The distance of 608 miles doesn't phase us at all, considering we're starting in Florida. We can do 600 miles of highway driving in a day without too much problem. Our record is 839 with kids and 913 without. But I don't know if it's all highway driving, or mountainous, or what to expect. Is this realistic?"

—Actual E-mail message taken from the Travel Forum of CompuServe, June

(One more reason to take the EMPIRE BUILDER. Somewhere out on the Interstate, there are more of these people, drinking coffee and popping pills. —Robert Rynerson.)

RAIL FANTRIPS

Sep 6 or 7: Historic Home Tour, Marshall, Mich. 34th annual tour, 12 or more homes. Museums, arts & crafts show, food, music, etc. $79 each includes rail fare from Chicago, home tour and breakfast. 20th Century Railroad Club, phone 312-829-4500 for more info.

Sep 9, 10, 15, 16, 21, 22, 27 or 28: 7-day boat trips, Islands & Wildlife of the Pacific Northwest. Lv Seattle, Puget Sound, San Juan Islands, Victoria, Gulf Islands, Princess Louisa Inlet, Vancouver, etc. $1990 up. Accent on Travel, 112 N Fifth St, Klamath Falls OR 97601. 800-347-0645.

Sep 20-25: Fall Colors & Historic Trains of New England. Six unique trains in 5 days, escorted tour via bus from Boston (air or rail from Chicago) $1209 up. 20th Century Railroad Club, 329 W 18th St, Suite 902, Chicago IL 60616. Phone 312-829-4500.

Sep 28: Cape Cod Railfan trip. Lv Hyannis MA 10am, frt-only tracks to Bay Colony limit near Rochester & to Otis Transfer sta. Cross Buzzards Bay Bridge 3 times. Return 2:30pm. Photo runbys $45 before Aug 15. South Shore Model Railway Club, Inc., PO Box 144, Weymouth MA 02188.

Oct 4: Berkshires Foliage Flyer, Boston-Albany NY, possible obs car "Caritas". Options: Hudson River cruise, lunch at Castaway, apple festival, Albany sightseeing. Atk & MBTA coaches. No smoking. $60. Massachusetts Bay RR Enthusiasts, PO Box 4245-BV, Andover MA 01810.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Next issue is our Excursion of the Month feature, appearing in alternate issues. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. E-mail rtn@trainweb.com

CARS & CONSISTS

***Amtrak Station Special Train**, Tampa FL June 6: engines 1 & 2 (P42s); cars baggage 1708 (ex-UP coach?), Amfleet II coach 21044 with NortheastDirect painted over, Amfleet II coach 44695 with NortheastDirect decal, 43352 Metroliner Dinette, Viewliner sleeper 62037 "Southern View".—Jos. L. Oates

***Empire Builder**, train 7, Sandpoint ID June 15: engines 34, 48 & 71 (P42s); cars 1268 baggage, Superliners 32000 & 32027 sleepers, 38011 diner, 34001 coach, 31525 coach-smoker, (Portland section:) 33018 lounge, 34097 coach, 31036 coach-baggage, 32069 sleeper, 1250 baggage.

***UP business car special**, leaving Spokane WA June 17 (to Portland?): engines 3613 & 3193; cars UP 114 "Feather River" open-platform-forward business car, UP 312 "North Platte" heavywt bus. car, open platform forward, UP 9005 'Walter Dean" dome lounge running backwards in train, UP 5011 "City of Denver" with kitchen forward, sleepers UP 201 "Wyoming", UP 1605 "Powder River", UP 1602 "Green River", UP 1610 "Portola", UP 315 "Little Rock", & UP 202 "Carbarton" (Budd-built), UP 207 baggage-power combine. Train all in fresh paint, spotted adjacent to UP yard office near Sprague & Freya east of downtown. —Glenn Lee.

***Maple Leaf**, Amtrak train 63, Jun 9: engine 702 (P32AC-DM); car 7608 Heritage coach NY-Albany (both preceding off at Albany). Engine 245 (F40) on at Albany; cars 21211 coach & 44677 coach both on at Albany, for USA passengers only, 20021 cafe, coaches for psgrs to Canada: 21143 & 21638. Just west of Syracuse, F40 245 began losing oil pressure & the electric power began to flicker and went dead. The train coasted into Buffalo, arriving 6mins late. One mechanical foreman took one look and was heard to say "We're finished". Passengers were bused to ongoing destinations. Train 64, the next day's MAPLE LEAF out of Toronto was annulled between Toronto and Buffalo. The associated VIA trains Niagara Falls-Toronto were also annulled, as they use the Amtrak equipment.—Alan Feinstein.

***Lake Cities**, train 352, Jackson MI May 11: engine 518 (P32); cars 43027 cafe, coaches 54526, 44555, 54527, & 54524 (all Horizon cars), cab control car 9649.—Geo. Danchisen.

***Crescent**, train 19, Newark NJ June 19: engines 946 & 927 (AEM-7s); cars 1252 & 1002 bag-mail, 2933 "Pacific Skies" crew-dorm, Viewliner slprs 62003 "Bay View" & 62012 "Harbor View", 8511 Heritage diner, Amfleet II 28005 lounge, 25057, 25026, 25091 & 25052 coaches, MHC no. unknown. Same, train 20: engines 923 & 933 (AEM-7s); cars 1433 MHC, 1138 bag-mail, 2924 "Pacific Patrol" crew-dorm, Viewliner slprs 62023 "Mystic View" & 62026 "Ocean View", 8524 Heritage diner, Amfleet II 28010 lounge, 25024, 25098, 25038 & 25??? coaches.

***Lake Shore**, VIA train 43, Smiths Falls ON May 30: engine 6421 (F40); cars 3463 VIA 1 LRC club, 3335, 3372, 3322 LRC coaches.

***International**, train VIA 85/Amtrak 365, Toronto ON May 31: engine 6428 (F40); cars Superliners 34095, 34024, 34028 coaches, 34510 snack-bar coach.

***Wolverine**, train 350, Chicago Jun 1: engine 503 (P32-8); Horizon cars 53002 custom coach/dinette, 54511, 54543, 54544, 54573 coaches, 90224 NPCU control cab-baggage. Same, train 351, Battle Creek MI: 90225 NPCU control cab/baggage, 1221 baggage, 53006 Horizon custom coach/dinette, ex-Metra MUs ·44554, 44557, 44---, 44552 coaches, engine 334 (F40).

***Erie**, VIA train 76, Windsor ON June 1: engine 6408 (F40); cars 3339, 3311, 3303 LRC coaches, 3471 VIA 1 LRC club.

***St. Clair,** VIA train 77, Aldershot ON June 1: engine 6405 (F40); cars 3475 VIA 1 LRC club, 3367, 3368, 3353 LRC coaches, 3458 VIA 1 LRC club (as coach?).—Jim Langan.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The following is in response to the letter by Greg Thompson on pages 22 and 23. Because of the large number of controversial issues raised in the letter, RTN feels compelled to present an alternate viewpoint on some of the issues:

First, it's not true that we can do nothing about subsidies to rail or other transportation. In fact, rail advocates have been doing a lot ever since the inception of Amtrak in 1971. It's clear that the various transportation modes do not operate on a level playing field in terms of government support. Basically, rail advocacy strategy over the years has been to increase support for environmentally and socially benign transportation and reduce support for less benign modes. Possibly advocates are somewhat obsessed with subsidies to the detriment of productivity improvement. That seems a natural response to the fact that the "fat cats" of transportation seem relatively unconcerned with subsidies, since they already have the lion's share. But even the fat cats often seem obsessed with diminishing the small share that rail receives.

The productivity advances that auto makers made are advances only in a narrow sense defined by normal economic criteria. If auto makers sell more vehicles and make more profits, does it really profit the nation in the long run when such profit and proliferation of vehicles come at vast social and environmental expense?

It is very difficult for us to swallow the argument that rail routes don't pay their full social costs. We would want to see full supporting statistics before accepting this idea.

It is not true that the Amtrak system idea has not worked. By whose narrow economic criteria has it not worked? The system has worked quite well, we believe, even though it is still too small and has too low a level of service. Simply saying that the system has not worked does not make the statement true. And there is no evidence either that politically the system "cannot work". Amtrak has very strong political support, and that fact has kept it going for these 26 years and we currently see strong support for the Amtrak half-penny.

It's not true that the Amtrak system has "no real purpose" other than maintaining itself. It has just as much purpose as our highway system and our system of airways—to move people where they want to go and by the mode they prefer.

It's not true either that the NE Corridor is the "only really useful" rail service in the US. All the Amtrak and other rail agencies' routes and services are useful to their users. Some have more users than others because of insufficient development of the routes. The same is true of highways—they are not all used equally, but to say they are not useful (unless they reach a certain level of saturation?) is unfair to their users.

While it is true in general that states and local agencies have not succeeded in speeding up trains under their jurisdiction, it is not true in California, for example, where Caltrans has been improving track and raising speeds of corridor trains.

Highways are not based totally on usage rather than geographical coverage. By the same token, no transportation system ideally should be so based. Like the Postal Service, which must deliver mail to everyone no matter where they live, Americans should be able to travel geographically wherever they want (within reason).

The Amtrak system is too small. There is no really good reason to try to reduce it further. Even without the geographical coverage argument, there are important places of high population and potentially high usage that are not on the system yet.

Train Time at Picayune

By Adron Hall

Almost unusual sequence of events occurred at Picayune MS on June 18, involving Amtrak trains. What would result in two Amtrak trains being in the Picayune passing siding at the same time, heading in the same direction? (Picayune has only the CRESCENT each way per day.)

The events unfolded thus: at 6:10pm the southbound CRESCENT's arrival time was asked of waiting passengers—"Is the train on time?" They replied as usual, in Southern drawl, "Well, we don't know. How can we find out?" A call to the Amtrak 800 number revealed that no. 19 had left Meridian MS (the last reporting station 150 miles north) on time (that would be the first time in weeks). But it was now 15mins overdue at Picayune.

After a few minutes, voices heard on the scanner were the engineers on no. 19, one in the lead engine, the other in the trialing unit, trying to locate a problem. Apparently the computer in the lead P42 had applied the brakes and wouldn't release them.

The train had stopped on the NS main line four miles north of Picayune. The engineers rebooted the computers on both units several times and tried other remedies, but to no avail. Meanwhile, the Birmingham dispatcher periodically checked no. 19's status inquiring what could be done to get the train moving. During these radio conversations, the dispatcher mentioned train 59, behind no. 19. Could this be the CITY OF NEW ORLEANS detouring, as occasionally it does, Jackson MS to Hattiesburg and to New Orleans via the CRESCENT route?

Yes, there had been a derailment of log cars on the IC south of Jackson. So here we had a CRESCENT that was on time from New York to within 59 miles of its end point (New Orleans), stopped with locked brakes, and the CITY OF NEW ORLEANS blocked behind it. People waiting at Picayune for incoming passengers drove the four miles to near Ozona in an attempt to retrieve their relatives. Even though a paved road was nearby, the brush was dense by the tracks, so the conductor wouldn't risk the passengers' safety to detrain there. For both the Picayune and New Orleans passengers, it was a case of "so near but yet so far."

After a couple of hours, the decision was made by an NS road foreman riding train 59 to shut down the systems on no. 19's lead unit and drive the train from the trailing unit to Picayune (at restricted speed, of course). There it would take siding, no. 59 could pull down the main and give no. 19 its lead unit, F40 #364. However, it came to light that no. 238, NS's primary container/piggyback train on this route, was waiting at X Tower, the end of double track from New Orleans, on the south side of Lake Pontchartrain, for a clear track. The NS road foreman then directed both Amtrak trains to take the Picayune siding. No. 19 proceeded into the siding and offloaded the Picayune passengers, now over two hours late at 8:15pm. There was now time before no. 238's arrival to move engine 364 south on the main, then back down on no. 19 from the south switch.

It was at this point that the conductor on no. 19 asked "Is there a way we can call the dispatcher and figure out these track warrants?" A warrant had been given to no. 59 (road foreman) to proceed to Picayune, which gave no. 59 clearance to the south switch. But now they simply wanted to move the 364 beyond the south switch. The road foreman would not give up his warrant because "my crew is on the law!" So no. 59 was stopped at the north switch, crew on the law, awaiting an Amtrak relief crew from New Orleans. (Is this getting complicated or what?)

Finally, the 364 was moved, put in the lead on no. 19, no. 59's relief crew arrived and moved into the siding behind no. 19, and no. 238 roared north at 60mph. No. 19 left at 10:17pm and no. 59 followed 10mins later. The trains arrived in New Orleans about midnight, no. 59 about 9hrs late and the CRESCENT 4hrs late (remember the latter was "on time" four miles north of Picayune!).

Coincidentally, the northbound CRESCENT on this same day was in a grade crossing accident at Eastabuchie north of Hattiesburg MS, in which there was one fatality and one critically injured in the involved vehicle.

The consists of the two waylaid trains at Picayune upon departure were: no. 19, engines 364, 69 & 72; cars 1507, 2436, 62000, 62008, 8509, 28020, 25013, 25028, 25055, 25095. No. 59, engines 26 & 28; cars 1187, 39039, 32026, 32009, 38001, 34039, 31535, 33009, 34074, 31012 & 32005.

THE OPEN VESTIBULE

Thanks for printing Tony Haswell's (RTN 568) thoughtful policy recommendations for intercity rail. I'd like to offer my comments on them after first responding to George Hildebrand's (RTN 568) letter.

In common with many passenger train proponents, Professor Hildebrand sees subsidies to other modes as the cause of the passenger train's sickness. I agree with this position up to a point, but I also believe that it is carried too far. Subsidies to other modes are not the only passenger train affliction, and by becoming obsessed with subsidies, about which we can do little, passenger train supporters ignore other, in some cases more serious afflictions, about which we can do something. The inefficiency of passenger trains is one of those afflictions.

For too long before the advent of Amtrak, the private providers of passenger train service wrung their hands over subsidies to other modes, about which they proved impotent to do anything, while they largely ignored productivity improvement for their own passenger trains. While they did little, auto makers, airline companies, and bus companies made giant productivity strides their watchword. As a consequence, and despite encouraging efforts by Amtrak to redress the situation, today's passenger trains are inefficient compared to other modes, and regardless of what is done about subsidies to other modes, we will not see much public money flow to passenger trains until the passenger train inefficiency problem is addressed.

I say this, admiring Amtrak for addressing productivity improvements that its predecessors ignored. Amfleet, F-40s, maybe Superliners (they carry more, but they also are much heavier and more complicated) and re-negotiation of labor contracts have made today's passenger train more efficient than its private predecessors. Despite this, Amtrak has not made as much progress as it seemed in the late 1980s. Much of what it called productivity improvement actually was deferred maintenance, for which we now are paying the price. In any event, more needs to be done. While Amtrak was making the passenger train more productive, airline companies and auto makers were making even greater productivity advances in deregulated and highly competitive markets.

The sad truth is that today even if airline passengers paid the full social costs of their mode of transportation, they would be paying less per passenger mile than users of long-distance and light density short-distance passenger trains, similarly required to pay their full social costs. Auto users are more heavily subsidized, particularly in congested corridors. They probably receive less subsidy in rural areas than train passengers and more subsidies in metropolitan areas, but this point needs to be studied. Some economists believe that even rail corridors in areas of heavy population density would not pay their way in terms of full social cost-accounting, though recent federal studies conclude that several corridors in the United States would pay their social costs, if properly developed and operated.

So, what should be done? I share Tony Haswell's disappointment over the progress that has been made around the concept of having a national system as a core, from which there would be incremental improvement. A quarter of a century is long enough to see whether an idea will work or not, and this idea has not worked. It now is apparent that politically it cannot work. For it to work, Amtrak needs to operate many *reliable* trains per day at much faster speeds on important route segments, but on equity grounds Amtrak refuses to upgrade any route (outside of the Northeast Corridor) unless it can upgrade all routes. It makes economic sense to upgrade only the routes of highest demand; to upgrade all routes would require billions and billions of dollars in government support, which Congress will never give. (There is a political rule of thumb that Congress will not subsidize programs such as Amtrak --- intense but narrow support with widespread but not intense opposition --- at more than about $1 billion per year.) So the national system just bumps along from year to year, decade to decade, with no real purpose other than maintaining itself.

One of the two major exceptions to all of this is the Northeast Corridor, which is the one really useful rail service in the United States. We should support its continued development, while developing additional corridors in areas of heavy population concentration. Subsidy should be confined to infrastructure improvement and perhaps infrastructure maintenance. While infrastructure maintenance is actually an operating expense that varies with the volume of service using the infrastructure, other modes receive infrastructure maintenance. Hopefully the Am-half-penny, which now has cleared the Senate, will provide such a fund for intercity rail infrastructure improvement.

The other area of innovation in passenger train improvement has come from state and regional agencies, though these initiatives to date have accomplished nothing other than talk in terms of speeding trains up. We should continue to support such initiatives and begin to exert pressure to have the services speeded up. Having long-distance trains operate on routes is not needed for state and regional development of corridors, though some type of federal partnership probably is. If there is an Am-half-penny, state and regional development of corridors should have access to it.

We also should encourage Amtrak to re-deploy its resources to greater effectiveness. This means (in addition to productivity improvement) shifting its resources away from rural service to heavily populated areas of the country. After intense debate in the early 1920s, highway interests decided to improve roads based on usage rather than geographic coverage, which is one reason why highways are relevant to the nation's transportation needs today. It is amazing that after a quarter of a century Amtrak has no rolling stock suitable for high passenger-volume but low-level platform corridor service outside of the Northeast Corridor. (The Flexliners and Talgo trains now on trial could meet this need, but it remains to be seen whether they will be purchased en masse.) Unfortunately, many in the passenger train advocacy community favor geographic coverage over need. So long as that sentiment prevails, trains never will be important in the United States.

While I agree with Tony Haswell that the concept of a national system should be questioned, I have my doubts as to whether one-train-per-day short distance trains between smaller cities, particularly if they have average scheduled speeds of less than 60 miles per hour, would find much of a market. Perhaps what is needed is agreement on a minimal national system --- smaller than today's---with one train per day. This would satisfy the geographic coverage requirement. Any growth over and above that would be based on usage criteria and would be only composed of corridor trains connecting the largest metropolitan areas.

To encourage continued productivity improvement, we need more than one operator of intercity passenger trains in the United States. The clause in the Amtrak law that gives it a monopoly stifles innovation. I agree with Tony Haswell that state and regional organizations could have greater incentive than Amtrak to operate efficient and demand-oriented passenger service in some areas of the country.

Privatization also should not be dismissed out of hand, as many passenger rail advocates are wont to do. Having just returned from Europe and England, I have to say that my previous skepticism about privatization has been replaced by an optimistic wait-and-see attitude. The way ahead for English privatization is difficult as government subsidies are reduced year-by-year, but the entrepreneurial ferment occurring in the English rail passenger industry is heady stuff and is unprecedented in the passenger rail industry in the English-speaking world. There are more trains, operators are squeezing the fat out of their operations, and their trains are fast and full at fairly high fares. Virgin Atlantic now earns more revenue from its rail operations than its air operations. Seeing all of this on top of experiencing the stunning turn-around of our own freight railroad system since it was deregulated in 1980 --- it is now by far the most important and financially successful freight rail system in the western world --- makes me think that we need to be more innovative in our thinking about how passenger rail is organized in this country. Privatization should be tried here, and private (or state or regional) operators should have access to the Am-half-penny fund on the basis of some type of bidding process.

While I have seen no evidence from our history of luxury trains, including luxury train initiatives of the past decade, to support Andrew Selden and Paul Mangelsdorf's (RTN 568) contention that long-distance cruise trains could make money, I think that those who want to take the gamble to operate them should have the chance to do so. If Messrs. Selden and Mangelsdorf are correct that Amtrak's long-distance fares are grossly inflated to pay for hidden Northeast Corridor costs, then Messrs. Selden and Mangelsdorf ought to be able to make a killing by organizing their own cruise trains offered to the public a much lower fare. (Other criticisms that Mr. Mangelsdorf made of my first letter to RTN (issue 562) I addressed in my second letter to RTN—issue 566.)

In summary, I would argue for a reduced national system to provide minimal geographic coverage, re-deployment of freed-up resources for development of additional service based on demand rather than equity, dedicated funding sources for infrastructure only, and administrative structures including privatization to compel continuing and vigorous productivity improvement.

Greg Thompson
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Tallahassee, Florida.

See Editor's note on p. 20.

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25 YEARS AGO IN RTN

(RTN 38, June 19, 1972): NARP Executive Director Joe Vranich tried to pick up a new June 11 Amtrak national timetable at Washington Union Station on June 12. The agent said they weren't in yet, but then allowed that they were in a back room, and they would get around to unpacking them in a day or two. "Can you come back?" Vranich fired off a letter to Amtrak President Roger Lewis: "Why should I 'come back' at all? Ever? I've received such bad treatment on your railroad lately that I'm toying with the idea of boycotting it... I've never been treated like this aboard any airline, bus line or ferryboat."

(RTN 38): Amtrak on June 11 renamed the CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR. New trains the CHIEF and the CAROLINA COAST began operation. Amtrak ran a test train NY-Montreal June 15.

(RTN 39, July 3, 1972): Amtrak's new Seattle-Vancouver BC train will begin operation on July 17. Senators Hartke, Robert Taft Jr., Weicker, Pell and Williams introduced the Interstate Railroad Act of 1972 to establish a basic system of railroad track that would be open to all railroads and maintained at high standards.

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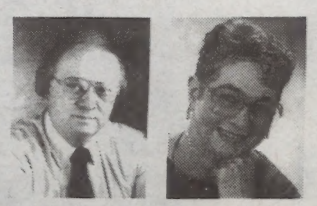

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